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ABSTRACT

Today's linguistically diverse classrooms require teachers who are properly educated to communicate effectively with students, parents, and the larger community. Teacher education programs have the responsibility of preparing teachers with these skills and of responding to the shortage of racial and ethnic minorities within the state of New York's teaching pool. Five issues are relevant when considering how schools of education should respond to this shortage: (1) currently, schools of education have a largely Caucasian, female, and monolingual student population; (2) the proliferation of languages among today's school population makes it imperative that teachers be prepared to offer bilingual learning opportunities to their students; (3) teacher education programs need the capacity to prepare multiculturally aware teachers; (4) teacher education programs need to prepare teachers who are willing and able to teach in areas of teacher shortage, particularly urban areas; and (5) schools of education must place multicultural competence on par with intellectual competence in their teacher education programs. At present, many schools of education fail to prepare teachers to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse students because these higher education institutions do not themselves model the kinds of interpersonal relationships, collegiality, student-centered pedagogy, and relevant curriculum that the teachers they produce must be able to implement. An approach to improving the ability of schools of education to respond to the needs of today's diverse school population lies in creating closer working relationships with schools. The Professional Development School as proposed by the Holmes Group is a promising model of meaningful collaboration. (IAH)

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ED 368 675

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF PREPARING TEACHERS FOR THE CLASSROOM OF TODAY

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY JOINT HEARING

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION (Edward C. Sullivan, Chair)
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION (Angelo Del Toro, Chair)

December 6, 1993

BY

Máximo C. Hernández

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Dear friends and colleagues:

To begin, I would like to commend you for taking this initiative. An activity of this nature was long overdue. It goes without saying that schools of education in New York State's colleges and universities need to examine themselves in the context of the radically changing needs of language-minority children and of our society. Recent demographic trends show that the ethnic and linguistic composition of our schools will become increasingly diverse as we enter the twenty-first century. Given the increasingly rich diversity of languages and cultures represented by our young people, we need to look at teacher preparation programs with a three-dimentional mirror. Our linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms call for competent practitioners.

Ten years after the publication of the "A Nation At Risk" report -that revolutionary thesis that started the education reform- we sadly recognize that such a reformation movement has failed. It is evident that our schools have not been keeping up

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with the changes that have been taking place in our society for many years. Why is this happening? Despite our recent technological advances, complemented with the great contributions brought forth by cognitive scientists, professional teachers, and teacher education itself, our goals for education in general are still stuck in the past. What are the factors that have contributed to this phenomenon?

It has been recognized that the improvement of teacher education is integral to the improvement of our public schools. The large and rapidly growing population of linguistically diverse students in our schools, combined with the belief that there is a direct link between the quality of teacher preparation and the efficacy of instructional programs, point towards a need to improve the ways prospective teachers are prepared. The goal of teacher education should be to produce emerging professionals well-equipped to organize meaningful educational experiences, but also who are energetic educational leaders disposed to be problem solvers, listen to students, and take other people's views into account.

Our linguistically diverse classrooms require properly trained professionals who are able to communicate effectively with their students. Additionally, they should be able to advise the larger school community and to establish communication links between the school and home. If our teachers are unprepared for this challenge, it would be reasonable to assume that they would be ineffective in

the development of appropriate teaching strategies to meet the needs of our culturally diverse students with a multiplicity of backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles.

Clearly, the preparation of teachers to perform successfully in a multilingual and multicultural society represents a professional challenge to schools of education. Prospective teachers, on the one hand, must become aware of the racial, social, linguistic, and cultural pluralism of our society. On the other hand, public education needs to serve as a unifying force while providing opportunities for all students to prepare themselves to live and to contribute effectively to that society.

There is a need for teacher preparation programs that will enable prospective teachers to understand their pupils' anxieties, insecurities, attitudes and prejudices. Developing teaching skills consistent with the accepted and expected aims of education for a multicultural society, along with an understanding of their pupils' environment, language and culture is also desirable.

With the above considerations in mind, I'd like to address five issues that I feel the Committee on Higher Education and the Committee on Education need to consider in terms of how education schools are responding to the shortage of racial and ethnic minorities in the State teaching pool:

(1) We find in our schools of education a largely Caucasian, female and monolingual population. How can it be that our public schools are becoming more diverse while their educators remain more homogeneous? The continuation of the present trend in our schools of education would simply perpetuate the negative trend that exists in our public schools. We need to be assured of where the needs lie in the recruitment and preparation of teachers to work in the public schools, colleges and universities. Schools of education need to reflect the full diversity of our society. Consequently, there is a need for specific goals of recruitment and preparation that have the potential to change the negative trend that we presently are experiencing, as well as to bring congruence between the student and educator diversity. We should be striving towards outcomes that can promote greater congruency between these two trends.

(2) There is an urgent need for educators prepared to teach, counsel, and work with children and adolescents whose first language is not English. Monolingual educators are commodities we can no longer afford. It is almost mind-boggling to consider the number of languages that are being spoken by students attending our schools. These students have a legitimate right to cling to their languages and cultures, and our state might as well prepare to meet their demands. Bilingual learning opportunities are essential for

many students in our schools. These students are not chess pieces in someone else's game. Schools of education programs need to accept the challenge of preparing educators who have the language competence to teach and to work with these students and their families. People who can provide the proper setting to extend language learning opportunities in their classrooms, and thus expanding their chances for becoming bilingual.

(3) There is a need for prospective teachers to be prepared to teach our children; not only from their own culture, but also from other cultures. We need students who are multiculturally competent. Our teacher education programs should have the capacity to help them become multiculturally aware. Students who are sensitive to cultures that are different from their own. The development of trust relationships, along with the ability to connect with students who are different in conversation and in discipline, many times become the building blocks for teaching and learning.

(4) There is a need to prepare educators who are willing and able to practice in settings where there are massive shortages. That is, public schools in the urban areas, where there are critical needs and where their skills are needed the most.

(5) There is also a need for classroom teachers to develop the abilities to understand both the intellectual competence, as well

as the incompetence students bring to the classroom. One should be able to do this with the cultural awareness one brings to the educational setting. Multicultural competence should be placed on equal ground with intellectual competence. Schools of education in our local colleges and universities fail to do this at the present time. We cannot be serious about celebrating equality and diversity in education schools unless we are also serious about the multicultural competence of the faculty in these schools.

The obvious conclusion is that our education schools are not preparing prospective teachers for our language-minority children well. It would be difficult to find highly interactive models of teacher preparation programs in this field in our colleges and universities. It is evident that changes are needed in the way teacher preparation programs are being conducted. When one visits schools of education it is difficult to find a community of scholars that are involved in a perpetual self-criticism and self-renewal through the discovery and sharing of knowledge. Instead, one finds individualistic departments generally marked by proliferation of divisions, oftentimes created to minimize friction, sanctify prestige, validate hierarchy, and cater to special interests.

Teacher educators are housed in their little cubicles, with little or no interaction among themselves. This separation between

teacher educators themselves within schools of education, together with a lack of authentic relationships between our colleges, universities, and our public schools, is crippling the advancement towards a more rigorous and connected preparation of prospective teachers; one that acknowledges the intellectual accomplishments of learning to teach.

Schools of education are partially responsible for the poor achievement of prospective teachers, given that many of them have very low standards for admission. The implementation of higher standards to more adequately screen institutions of higher education in the design, and evaluation of programs is highly desirable. Thus, instituting more rigorous and measurable standards to encourage higher achievement should always be encouraged.

We need to understand, however, that it would be difficult to raise and implement standards when not enough diverse and academically qualified students are being attracted to teaching, and when teacher education leans so heavily on generic courses that many prospective teachers themselves say are useless. I can corroborate from personal experiences as a college student that many students of teaching spend too much time listening to lectures delivered from textbooks based on research that is minimally connected to life as practicing teachers.

Education schools should strive to create closer working relations with schools and the communities in which they exist. They must also prepare thoughtful and effective professionals that are motivated to meet the needs of the language-minority children and the community they serve. Schools of education must be leaders, risk takers, and key players in developing and demonstrating a systematic approach to innovative solutions to our present problems. In order to accomplish this task, they should make teacher preparation programs more rigorous and connected to the practice and specific necessities of individual public schools.

In direct response to these concerns, the Holmes Group (a national consortium of the leading research universities dedicated to the reform of teaching and teacher education), created the Professional Development School (PDS). The PDS model, in theory and in practice, contains remedies for what ails teacher education programs today. A PDS has the greatest potential for improving the quality of instruction for all students, while indirectly contributing to bringing change to the larger school environment. Its implementation within education schools is of upmost importance in the preparation of our language-minority teachers.

PDSs serve as new kinds of P-12 public schools where wide range of well-intentioned professionals with strong research backgrounds establish partnerships with the broader education community in their efforts to anticipate solutions to emerging

social, educational, economic, and political concerns. In essence, these are places where future teachers get to study subjects they will teach with instructors who model effective teaching and who understand the pedagogical implications of their material.

It is assumed that education schools are truly determined to help build communities of practice and inquiry that will endure over time. In order to accomplish this they need to restructure those programs that prepare emerging professionals to understand and address the learning needs of all children in an increasingly multiethnic society. This reflects the fundamental understanding that in order for institutions of higher learning to settle the educational frontier in this nation they must first start from within. That is, reshape themselves to fit the increased diversity of children in a changing America, and to ensure that these children do not continue to consider themselves as an entity apart from the mainstream.

It is imperative that schools of education cultivate interactions with the P-12 public schools in terms of short and long-term directions as well as prospects for cumulative change and collaborative work that is strongly rooted in reflective practice and partnership among peers. In order for schools of education to fulfill their promise, they must embrace the magnitude of this task.

As the institutions that have in their hands the important task of educating teachers, education schools not only must help socialize these emerging professionals, they should also prepare them in terms of being able to work well with the persons with whom they have the responsibility of working with. If these are the hallmarks of being a qualified professional, then certainly prospective teachers who prepare themselves in our colleges and universities should be able to live up to these ideals.

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